

THE GEOGRAPHICAL HISTORY OF **QURAN**

(تاریخ ارض القرآن)

(pp. 251-265)

The People of Midian

Author: Syed Suleman Nadvi

Translation: Waqar Akbar Cheema

The Progeny of Prophet Abraham

Prophet Abraham had three wives, Sarah, Hager and Ketura.

Sarah's son was Isaac. He had two sons, Jacob who became the father of House of Israel and Esau whose surname was Edom. From this line (of Abraham's progeny) Edom went to Ishmael and dwelt with him in Arabia while the rest stayed back in Syria and Egypt.

Children of Ketura, one of them being Midian, were made to settle in Arabia by their father. Among the Children of Ketura only People of Midian and Dedan are known and others are not.

From Hager's womb only one son Ishmael was born. He also dwelt in Arabia by his father's order. This part of the 'Geographical History of Quran' gives the details of these people and even among them only such have been discussed at length who find mention in the Holy Quran in some capacity.

1. Among the Children of Ketura, the people of Midian and those of Dedan (*As`haabul Aika*).
2. Among the Children of Sarah, the Edom i.e. Prophet Job and his family.
3. Among the Children of Hager; Ishmael, Anbat, Kedar and the Quraish.

Children of Ketura

The Midian

Prophet Shoaib

(From 2000 B.C. to 1000 B.C.)

This has been mentioned a number of times that Semitic nations often named their dwellings and tribes after their elders. The Land of Midian whose conditions will be described in this section¹ is named after its founder Midian, the son of Abraham.

Midian established his population in his own name near his brother Ishmael². Their land in length stretched from the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba to the coast of the Red Sea and the land of Thamud and Hijaz where Thamud, Jurham and Ishmaelite Arabs lived.

We assume the beginning of the history of Midian at 2000 B.C. as the period of Abraham, the father of Midian, was 2100 or 2200 B.C. For a family to grow into a nation atleast two hundred years are required. It is for this reason that Midianites appears in Bible as traders firstly during the days of Jacob (2000 B.C.)

The trading caravan that took Joseph from Canaan to Egypt was of the Midianites and Ishmaelite Arabs (Genesis 37:27-36) thus in the following verse of the Holy Quran;

¹As Midian was the place to which Moses made an exodus and the people always had relations of war or peace within themselves thus we find detailed mentioning of Midian in Bible and we will refer to it. In the Greek and Roman history there is no mention of Midian because in their times the Nabatians controlled this region and they mainly dwelt in Rekem and Al-Hijr.

²Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* - Book II, Chapter 11

وَجَاءَتْ سَيَّارَةٌ فَأَرْسَلُوا وَارِدَهُمْ فَأَدْلَى دَلْوَهُ ^ص قَالَ يَا بَشْرَىٰ هَذَا غُلَامٌ ^ج وَأَسْرُوهُ بَضَاعَةٌ ^ج وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ
وَشَرَوْهُ بِثَمَنٍ بَخْسٍ دَرَاهِمَ مَعْدُودَةٍ وَكَانُوا فِيهِ مِنَ الزَّاهِدِينَ

Then there came a caravan of travellers: they sent their water-carrier (for water), and he let down his bucket (into the well)...He said: "Ah there! Good news! Here is a (fine) young man!" So they concealed him as a treasure! But Allah knoweth well all that they do! The (Brethren) sold him for a miserable price, for a few dirhams counted out: in such low estimation did they hold him!

(Al-Quran 12:19-20)

Caravan should be understood as the Midianites and Muslim commentators have done the same.

This seems to be the first instance in the history of trade and first Midianite and Ishmaelite Arab trade caravan. And Egypt seems to be first destination in their trading journey. Two thousand years before Christ the trading material of the conservative Midianite and Ishmaelite Arabs was the same as has always been among the Arabs i.e. scents, spices, balm and myrrh.¹

After this event, for four hundred years, there is complete silence about Midian's history. The reason is that Historians of Midian are (from) the House of Israel and this is their period of stay in Egypt. Four hundreds years later when Moses was born and when on the charges of 'calling to truth' and 'national love' he was made to leave Egypt then his refuge was the land of the very caravan that brought them to Egypt four hundreds years ago, that is to say Midian².

The people of Midian normally undertook the same profession as was that of the most of the Semitic nations i.e. cattle rearing. It was the same occupation that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had and that not possible for Moses to undertake in the cultured life of Egypt. It was necessary for the great Prophet of Semites to undergo the lessons of rearing the cattle before taking the responsibility of leading the world so providence made Moses to leave the civilized land of Egypt and sent him to the unsophisticated land of Arabia where Semite simpletons had yet not given up their ancestral way of life and moral values.

However the tribes of Midian lived an organized life. For instruction in religion and keeping the rites there were priests. Often the same priests used to be the legal rulers of the city. The priest at the time of Moses is at times called Reuel³ in Bible and at times Jethro⁴ and at times Hobab⁵ but to most of the Muslim commentators he is Shoaib which is closer to Hobab as a word (considering their actual Semitic forms).

Migrating from Egypt when Moses came to the city of Midian he became a guest of the same Hobab or Shoaib and accepted to graze the goat for him and as a reward Shoaib married one of his daughters to him.⁶

Quran mentions Midian for two reasons. Firstly in connection to Prophet Shoaib (Jethro) and secondly, in relation to Prophet Moses. Verses in relation to Prophet Moses are;

¹Genesis 37:25

²Exodus 2:15 and the Quran

³Exodus 2:18

⁴Exodus 3:1

⁵Numbers 10:29

⁶Exodus 2:21

فَلَبِثْتَ سِنِينَ فِي أَهْلِ مَدْيَنَ ثُمَّ جِئْتَ عَلَىٰ قَدَرٍ يَا مُوسَىٰ

Then didst thou tarry a number of years with the people of Midian. Then didst thou come hither as ordained, O Moses!

(Al-Quran 20:40)

وَلَمَّا تَوَجَّهَ تَلْقَاءَ مَدْيَنَ قَالَ عَسَىٰ رَبِّي أَن يَهْدِيَنِي سَوَاءَ السَّبِيلِ وَلَمَّا وَرَدَ مَاءَ مَدْيَنَ وَجَدَ عَلَيْهِ أُمَّةً مِّنَ النَّاسِ يَسْقُونَ

Then, when he turned his face towards (the land of) Midian, he said: "I do hope that my Lord will show me the smooth and straight Path." And when he arrived at the watering (place) in Madyan, he found there a group of men watering (their flocks).

(Al-Quran 28:22-23)

When Moses along with the House of Israel escaped from Egypt and entered Arabia the priest of Midian received them. The people of Israel who were just free from the yoke of slavery and were unversed in discipline used to surround the Prophet like sheep all the time. They used to refer to him for every small little thing. The Priest of Midian told him how to control the people and the way to organize them. First there are rulers of thousands, then of hundreds, then rulers of tens and only the differences among the rulers be brought to the Chief (i.e. Moses) for judgement¹.

With the mention of this incident we intend to show how much has the culture of Midian developed by that time.

Around 1600 or 1700 B.C. which was the time of Moses, Midian was ruled by five leaders or as the Bible calls them kings. Their names were Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and Reba².

Josephus the Jew, who lived in the first century of Christian era said that the city Rekem was named after the Midianite King. Arabs still call it 'Raqeem' and the Romans Petra.³ So how ridiculous is contention of a renowned Egyptian Christian historian that the word 'Raqeem' is the Arabized form of its little known Roman name 'Irka'. Josephus himself lived when Rekem or Petra existed. Whose research can be more reliable than his?

Anyway from this incident we intend to determine the northern boundary of Midian in ancient times. Petra or Rekem is situated near Syria between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba. So this should be taken as the northern boundary of Midian. One hundred and fifty years later Bible mentions the names of four more kings of Midian Zebah, Zalmunna, Oreb and Zeeb.⁴ The presence of various kings at a time shows the region was divided into various states and tribes.

Religious and Moral Condition of Midian and its Destruction:

Close to Midian lived the Moab. Religiously and morally both were in the worst condition. All the evils that a civilization (possibly) brings up had taken root there. Idolatry and sacrifices at altars was their belief. Their chief idol was Baalpeor.⁵ Moral values had deteriorated to the extent that even the women of the nobles were indulged in shameful conduct while cruelty and injustice was a routine for the men.

¹Exodus 18

²Numbers 31:8

³Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book IV Chapter 7

⁴Judges 7:25 & Judges 8:15

⁵Numbers 25:18

Coming out of Egypt, Israelites encamped in the plains of Moab and Midian. In their mischief the Midianites plotted against the Israel. The women played harlotry for the Children of Israel, made them to rebel against their leader invited them to bow down to their god and to sacrifices to Baalpeor¹. Men conspired with the neighbouring people to destroy Israel and called Balaam, the priest of Ammon to come and curse the people of Israel.² At this eve;

"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites: afterward shalt thou be gathered unto thy people."
(Numbers 31:1-2)

In wake of the circumstances, to punish the wicked populace of Midian and to discipline the Children of Israel, it became essential to wage a war against the Midian and its allies as per the commandment.

Against the combined force of Moab, Heshbon and Midian Moses sent twelve thousand men. The enemy lost in spite of their numerical and material strength. Five kings of Midian Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and Reba were killed. All men, (married) women and male children were killed, virgins taken as captives and the wealth taken as booty.³

After this destruction of Midian we find Midian with Ishmaelites and after this even the inhabitants of Midian mentioned in Bible are infact these Ishmaelites. After about hundred and fifty years of the destruction of Midian, lead by the Ishmaelite Midianites, the Amalekites and other Arab tribes attacked Israel. Each year at the time of harvest they used to come like furious wind and plunder crops, cattle and whatever they found. The Children of Israel used to quit their habitats and take refuge in the mountains and in the caves.⁴

At last a leader, Gideon, gathered the strength of Israel and with only three hundred⁵ selected men he attacked the Midianites under the cover of night. At night the people drew their swords against each other and one hundred and twenty thousand⁶ Midianites were killed by attacking adversaries and by each other. Two kings, Oreb and Zeeb, were captured and were killed.⁷ Two other kings, Zeba and Zalmunna, fled away with fifteen hundred men but couldn't find any refuge. (They were also killed later)

Hobab or Shoaib:

It has been mentioned above that the name of the father-in-law of Moses in Bible is Jethro and Hobab. According to a Hebrew commentary of Bible there are ten names of Jethro. Whether or not there are actually ten names, atleast two are mentioned in Bible itself. Learned German scholar Heinrichewald says;

"His real name was Hobab and Jethro was an epithet of honor which literally means 'perfect'. It is same as the word Kohen is used among Jews and Imam among Muslims."⁸

At another place he writes;

"(Hobab's) name in Quran and among Muslim is Shoaib. This is a rendering of Hobab. Muslims commentators also generally understand Jethro, Hobab and Shoaib as one."

¹Numbers 25:2

²Numbers 22:5-6

³Numbers 31

⁴Judges 6

⁵Judges 7:22

⁶Judges 8:10

⁷Judges 7:25

⁸*History of Israel*, (English Translation) vol.1 p.25

Prophet Shoaib and the Quran:

The joint mentioning of Midian and Shoaib is in three chapters (*surahs*) of the Quran; Al-A'raf (7), Hud (11) and Ankaboot (29).

وَالِىَ مَدْيَنَ أَخَاهُمْ شُعَيْبًا ۖ قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَهٍ غَيْرُهُ ۖ قَدْ جَاءَتْكُمْ بَيِّنَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ ۖ فَأَوْفُوا الْكَيْلَ
وَالْمِيزَانَ وَلَا تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْيَاءَهُمْ وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا ۚ ذَلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ
وَلَا تَقْعُدُوا بِكُلِّ صِرَاطٍ تُوعِدُونَ وَتَصُدُّونَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ مَنْ آمَنَ بِهِ وَتَبْغُونَهَا عِوَجًا ۚ وَاذْكُرُوا إِذْ كُنْتُمْ قَلِيلًا
فَكَثَرَكُمُ ۖ وَانْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُفْسِدِينَ ۚ وَإِنْ كَانَ طَائِفَةٌ مِنْكُمْ آمَنُوا بِالَّذِي أُرْسِلَتْ بِهِ وَطَائِفَةٌ لَمْ يُؤْمِنُوا
فَاصْبِرُوا حَتَّىٰ يَحْكُمَ اللَّهُ بَيْنَنَا ۚ وَهُوَ خَيْرُ الْحَاكِمِينَ ۚ قَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ لَنُخْرِجَنَّكَ يَا شُعَيْبُ
وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَكَ مِنْ قَرْيَتِنَا أَوْ لَتَعُوذُنَّ فِي مِلَّتِنَا ۚ قَالَ أُولُو كُنَّا كَارِهِينَ قَدْ افْتَرَيْنَا عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا إِنْ عُدْنَا فِي
مِلَّتِكُمْ بَعْدَ إِذْ نَجَّانَا اللَّهُ مِنْهَا ۚ وَمَا يَكُونُ لَنَا أَنْ نَعُودَ فِيهَا إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ رَبُّنَا ۚ وَسِعَ رَبُّنَا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا ۚ عَلَى
اللَّهِ تَوَكَّلْنَا ۚ رَبَّنَا افْتَحْ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَ قَوْمِنَا بِالْحَقِّ وَأَنْتَ خَيْرُ الْفَاتِحِينَ ۚ وَقَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ لَنَّ اتَّبَعْتُمْ
شُعَيْبًا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ إِذًا لَخَاسِرُونَ ۚ فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الرَّجْفَةُ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دَارِهِمْ جَاثِمِينَ ۚ فَتَوَلَّىٰ عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا قَوْمِ لَقَدْ أَبْلَغْتُكُمْ
رِسَالَاتِ رَبِّي وَنَصَحْتُ لَكُمْ ۖ فَكَيْفَ آسَىٰ عَلَىٰ قَوْمٍ كَافِرِينَ

To the Madyan people We sent Shu'aib, one of their own brethren: he said: "O my people! worship Allah; Ye have no other god but Him. Now hath come unto you a clear (Sign) from your Lord! Give just measure and weight, nor withhold from the people the things that are their due; and do no mischief on the earth after it has been set in order: that will be best for you, if ye have Faith. "And squat not on every road, breathing threats, hindering from the path of Allah those who believe in Him, and seeking in it something crooked; But remember how ye were little, and He gave you increase. And hold in your mind's eye what was the end of those who did mischief. "And if there is a party among you who believes in the message with which I have been sent, and a party which does not believe, hold yourselves in patience until Allah doth decide between us: for He is the best to decide. The leaders, the arrogant party among his people, said: "O Shu'aib! we shall certainly drive thee out of our city - (thee) and those who believe with thee; or else ye (thou and they) shall have to return to our ways and religion." He said: "What! even though we do detest (them)? "We should indeed invent a lie against Allah, if we returned to your ways after Allah hath rescued us therefrom; nor could we by any manner of means return thereto unless it be as in the will and plan of Allah, Our Lord. Our Lord can reach out to the utmost recesses of things by His knowledge. In the Allah is our trust. our Lord! decide Thou between us and our people in truth, for Thou art the best to decide." The leaders, the unbelievers among his people, said: "If ye follow Shu'aib, be sure then ye are ruined!" But the earthquake took them unawares, and they lay prostrate in their homes before the morning! The men who reject Shu'aib became as if they had never been in the homes where they had flourished: the men who rejected Shu'aib - it was they who were ruined! So Shu'aib left them,

saying: "O my people! I did indeed convey to you the messages for which I was sent by my Lord: I gave you good counsel, but how shall I lament over a people who refuse to believe!"

(Al-Quran Al-A'raaf 7:85-93)

More detail is found in *Surah Hud*;

وَالِىٰ مَدْيَنَ أَخَاهُمْ شُعَيْبًا ؕ قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَهِ غَيْرُهُ ؕ وَلَا تَنْقُصُوا الْمِكْيَالَ وَالْمِيزَانَ ؕ إِنَّيٰ أَرَاكُمْ بِخَيْرٍ وَإِنِّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ مُّحِيطٍ - وَيَا قَوْمِ أَوْفُوا الْمِكْيَالَ وَالْمِيزَانَ بِالْقِسْطِ ؕ وَلَا تَبْخُسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْيَاءَهُمْ وَلَا تَعْتُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ بَقِيَّتُ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنْتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِينَ ؕ وَمَا أَنَا عَلَيْكُمْ بِحَفِيظٍ - قَالُوا يَا شُعَيْبُ أَصْلَافُكَ تَأْمُرُكَ أَنْ نَتْرُكَ مَا يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤُنَا أَوْ أَنْ نَفْعَلَ فِي أَمْوَالِنَا مَا نَشَاءُ ؕ إِنَّكَ لَأَنْتَ الْحَلِيمُ الرَّشِيدُ - قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِن كُنْتُ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّي وَرَزَقَنِي مِنْهُ رِزْقًا حَسَنًا ؕ وَمَا أُرِيدُ أَنْ أُخَالِفَكُمْ إِلَىٰ مَا أَنهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ ؕ إِن أُرِيدُ إِلَّا الْإِصْلَاحَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُ ؕ وَمَا تَوْفِيقِي إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ ؕ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَإِلَيْهِ أُنِيبُ - وَيَا قَوْمِ لَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شِقَاقِي أَنْ يُصِيبَكُمْ مِثْلُ مَا أَصَابَ قَوْمَ نُوحٍ أَوْ قَوْمَ هُودٍ أَوْ قَوْمَ صَالِحٍ ؕ وَمَا قَوْمُ لُوطٍ مِنْكُمْ بِبَعِيدٍ - وَاسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ ثُمَّ تُوبُوا إِلَيْهِ ؕ إِنَّ رَبِّي رَحِيمٌ وَدُودٌ - قَالُوا يَا شُعَيْبُ مَا نَفَقَهُ كَثِيرًا مِّمَّا تَقُولُ وَإِنَّا لَنَرَاكَ فِينَا ضَعِيفًا ؕ وَلَوْ لَا رَهْطُكَ لَرَجَمْنَاكَ ؕ وَمَا أَنْتَ عَلَيْنَا بَعِزٌّ - قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ أَرَهْطِي أَعَزُّ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَاتَّخَذْتُمُوهُ وَرَاءَكُمْ ظَهْرِيًّا ؕ إِنَّ رَبِّي بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ مُّحِيطٌ - وَيَا قَوْمِ اعْمَلُوا عَلَىٰ مَكَاتَتِكُمْ إِنِّي عَامِلٌ ؕ سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ مَنْ يَأْتِيهِ عَذَابٌ يُخْزِيهِ وَمَنْ هُوَ كَاذِبٌ ؕ وَارْتَقِبُوا إِنِّي مَعَكُمْ رَقِيبٌ - وَلَمَّا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا نَجَّيْنَا شُعَيْبًا وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ بِرَحْمَةٍ مِنَّا وَأَخَذَتِ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا الصَّيْحَةَ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دِيَارِهِمْ جَاثِمِينَ - كَأَن لَّمْ يَغْنَوْا فِيهَا ؕ آلَا بُعْدًا لِّمَدْيَنَ كَمَا بَعَدَتْ ثَمُودُ

To the Madyan People (We sent) Shu'aib, one of their own brethren: he said: "O my people! worship Allah: Ye have no other god but Him. And give not short measure or weight: I see you in prosperity, but I fear for you the penalty of a day that will compass (you) all round. "And O my people! give just measure and weight, nor withhold from the people the things that are their due: commit not evil in the land with intent to do mischief. "That which is left you by Allah is best for you, if ye (but) believed! but I am not set over you to keep watch!" They said: "O Shu'aib! Does thy (religion of) prayer command thee that we leave off the worship which our fathers practised, or that we leave off doing what we like with our property? truly, thou art the one that forbearst with faults and is right-minded!" He said: "O my people! see ye whether I have a Clear (Sign) from my Lord, and He hath given me sustenance (pure and) good as from Himself? I wish not, in opposition to you, to do that which I forbid you to do. I only desire (your) betterment to the best of my power; and my success (in my task) can only come from Allah. In Him I trust, and unto Him I look. "And O my people! let not my dissent (from you) cause you to sin, lest ye suffer a fate similar to that of the people of Noah or of Hud or of Salih, nor are the people of Lut far off from you! "But ask forgiveness of your Lord, and turn unto Him (in repentance): For my Lord is indeed full of mercy and loving-kindness." They said: "O Shu'aib! much of what thou sayest we do not understand! In fact among us we see that thou hast no strength! Were it not for thy family, we should certainly have stoned thee! for thou hast among us no great position!" He said: "O my people! is then my family of more consideration with you than Allah? For ye cast Him away behind your backs (with contempt). But verily my Lord encompasseth on all sides all that ye do! "And O my people! Do whatever

ye can: I will do (my part): Soon will ye know who it is on whom descends the penalty of ignominy; and who is a liar! and watch ye! for I too am watching with you!" When Our decree issued, We saved Shu'aib and those who believed with him, by (special) mercy from Ourselves: But the (mighty) blast did seize the wrong-doers, and they lay prostrate in their homes by the morning,- As if they had never dwelt and flourished there! Ah! Behold! How the Madyan were removed (from sight) as were removed the Thamud!

(Al-Quran, Hud 11:84-95)

وَالِىٰ مَدْيَنَ أَخَاهُمْ شُعَيْبًا فَقَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَارْجُوا الْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَلَا تَعْتَوْا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ - فَكَذَّبُوهُ
فَأَخَذَتْهُمْ الرَّجْفَةُ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دَارِهِمْ جَاثِمِينَ

To the Madyan (people) (We sent) their brother Shu'aib. Then he said: "O my people! serve Allah, and fear the Last Day: nor commit evil on the earth, with intent to do mischief." But they rejected him: Then the mighty Blast seized them, and they lay prostrate in their homes by the morning.

(Al-Quran, Ankaboot 29:36-37)

The events and situation of Midian mentioned in these verses has not been fully explained because the history of Midian was not considered by our commentators. Firstly they are unaware of the mutual relation and conflicts between the people of Midian and the Children of Israel except the relation between Moses and Shoaib and for this reason they make no mention of (all) those events. However we think that these verses are very much related to those events.

First verse is:

وَالِىٰ مَدْيَنَ أَخَاهُمْ شُعَيْبًا

"To the Madyan people We sent Shu'aib, one of their own brethren."

(Al-Quran 7:85 / 11:84 / 29:36)

This verse informs us of the two things. Firstly that here the word Midian refers to the People of Midian. Secondly that Shoaib was from the family of Midian.

The first argument in the dialogue between Prophet Shoaib and People of Midian was;

قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَهٍ غَيْرُهُ

"O my people! worship Allah; Ye have no other god but Him."

(Al-Quran 7:85 / 11:84)

And we have seen above that they worshipped deities like Baalpeor etc.

Then it is said:

فَأَوْفُوا الْكَيْلَ وَالْمِيزَانَ وَلَا تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْيَاءَهُمْ

"Give just measure and weight, nor withhold from the people the things that are their due."

(Al-A'raaf 7: 85)

لَا تَنْقُصُوا الْمِكْيَالَ وَالْمِيزَانَ ۚ إِنِّي أَرَاكُمْ بِخَيْرٍ وَإِنِّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ مُّحِيطٍ - وَيَا قَوْمِ أَوْفُوا الْمِكْيَالَ وَالْمِيزَانَ بِالْقِسْطِ ۖ وَلَا تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْيَاءَهُمْ

"And give not short measure or weight: I see you in prosperity, but I fear for you the penalty of a day that will compass (you) all round. "And O my people! give just measure and weight, nor withhold from the people the things that are their due."
(Hud 11: 84-85)

In the beginning of this section it is mentioned that Midian was a trading nation and perhaps it was the first nation in the world's history to take up trade as its profession. And thus they would have developed this detestable characteristic which seems quite certain in their circumstances.

When People of Israel entered Arabia from Egypt they had no supplies of ration so they used to buy from the nations of round about or snatch by force. May be this characteristic of Midianites had something to do with (their dealings with) Israel as well but the fact is that these verses do not merely relate to measuring less in trade but it encompasses usury, bad debt and other forbidden trading schemes that merchants use to deprive the people from their rightful share. It is for this reason that People of Prophet Shoaib answered;

أَوْ أَنْ نَفْعَلَ فِي أَمْوَالِنَا مَا نَشَاءُ

"(Does your religion say) that we leave off doing what we like with our property?"
(Hud 11: 87)

This opinion is also supported by some other traditions of the commentators:

لَهُمْ عَنْ قَطْعِ الدَّنَانِيرِ وَالِدِرَاهِمِ وَزَعَمَ أَنَّهُ مُحْرَمٌ عَلَيْهِمْ، فَقَالُوا: أَوْ أَنْ نَفْعَلَ فِي أَمْوَالِنَا مَا نَشَاءُ

"Shoaib forbade them from taking interest on debt and declared it to be forbidden. They said; 'should we not use our wealth the way we desire.'"¹

Ibn Jarir Tabari writes in *Tarikh*;

عن زيد بن أسلم في قوله عز وجل: "أَصْلَاتِكَ تَأْمُرُكَ أَنْ تَتْرَكَ مَا يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤُنَا أَوْ أَنْ نَفْعَلَ فِي أَمْوَالِنَا مَا نَشَاءُ" ،

قال: كان مما ينهاهم عنه حذف الدراهم - أو قال: قطع الدراهم

عن محمد بن كعب القرظي يقول: بلغني أن قوم شعيب عذبوا في قطع الدراهم، ثم وجدت ذلك في القرآن:

"أَصْلَاتِكَ تَأْمُرُكَ أَنْ تَتْرَكَ مَا يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤُنَا أَوْ أَنْ نَفْعَلَ فِي أَمْوَالِنَا مَا نَشَاءُ"

"Regarding the verse; ' Does thy (religion of) prayer command thee that we leave off the worship which our fathers practised, or that we leave off doing what we like with our property?' it is narrated from Zaid bin Aslam that Shoaib forbade them from taking interest."

"It is narrated from Muhammad bin Ka'b Qardhi, he said; 'I had known that people of Shoaib were punished for taking interest then I came around this verse in the Quran. " Does thy (religion of) prayer command thee that we leave off the worship which our fathers practised, or that we leave off doing what we like with our property?"²

¹Baghwi, *Tafseer Ma'alim al-Tanzeel* vol.4 p.195

²Tabari, *Tarikh Rusul wal Malook*, vol.1 p.126

Thereafter it is said in the Quran:

وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا ۚ ذَلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

**"And do no mischief on the earth after it has been set in order: that will be best for you, if ye have Faith."
(A'raf 7:85)**

وَلَا تَعْتَوْا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ

**"commit not evil in the land with intent to do mischief."
(Hud 11: 85)**

Generally commentators even Imam Razi also understand 'mischief' as 'disbelief' and 'setting in order' as rise of the Prophet Shoaib however it refers to peace and cessation of hostilities after conflict and troubles with People of Israel. Thus the words that follow are;

وَلَا تَعْتَوْا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ بَقِيَّتُ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

**"commit not evil in the land with intent to do mischief. "That which is left you by Allah is best for you, if ye (but) believed!"
(Hud 11: 85)**

'Which is left' is generally understood by our commentators that, after the declaration of the unlawful whatever is lawful is quite enough for you, so why you long for the unlawful. But if this be the case then what connection will it have with the beginning and end of the verse? 'Do not make mischief in the land for whatever is lawful is enough.'? Mischief in the land and being content on the lawful have no connection.

We believe that considering the history of Midian the meanings become evident. The people of Midian wanted to take back the land the Israel occupied after their Exodus from Egypt. Prophet Shoaib (Jethro) says that do not make mischief and be content what Allah has left for you of land. The people of Midian respond by saying;

قَالُوا يَا شُعَيْبُ أَصْلَاحُكَ تَأْمُرُكَ أَنْ نَتْرُكَ مَا يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤُنَا أَوْ أَنْ نَفْعَلَ فِي أَمْوَالِنَا مَا نَشَاءُ ۖ إِنَّكَ لَأَنْتَ الْحَلِيمُ الرَّشِيدُ

**"O Shu'aib! Does thy (religion of) prayer command thee that we leave off the worship which our fathers practised, or that we leave off doing what we like with our property? truly, thou art the one that forbearth with faults and is right-minded!"
(Hud 11: 87)**

There were two aims of the war. One to avenge the disregard of the god Baalpeor or fighting the God of Israel and to take back the land and wealth from Israel by whatever means possible even the unlawful. The Midianites say; 'Shall we leave off doing that.' And by the way of sarcasm say; 'You are too pious and intellegent' or 'do

you not get enraged on the religious and material annihilation of the nation, infact you are too forbearing and pious.' Prophet Shoaib says in response;

قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّي وَرَزَقَنِي مِنْهُ رِزْقًا حَسَنًا ۖ وَمَا أُرِيدُ أَنْ أُخَالِفَكُمْ إِلَىٰ مَا أَنْهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ ۖ إِنْ أُرِيدُ إِلَّا الْإِصْلَاحَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُ ۖ وَمَا تَوْفِيقِي إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ

**"He said: "O my people! see ye whether I have a Clear (Sign) from my Lord, and He hath given me sustenance (pure and) good as from Himself? I wish not, in opposition to you, to do that which I forbid you to do. I only desire (your) betterment to the best of my power; and my success (in my task) can only come from Allah."
(Hud 11: 88)**

'Desire of betterment' may refer to spiritual reform but may well refer to attempts on bringing peace between Midianites and Israelites.

But despite of preaching and guidance the mischievious (Midianites) did not refrain from evil and mischief. Under the commandment of Prophet Moses all the men, (male) children and married women of Midianites were killed and thirty two thousand virgins were taken as captives.¹ This was the end of the history of Midianites.

فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الرَّجْفَةُ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دَارِهِمْ جَاثِمِينَ

**"But the earthquake took them unawares, and they lay prostrate in their homes before the morning!"
(A'raaf 7: 91)**

وَأَخَذَتِ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا الصَّيْحَةَ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دِيَارِهِمْ جَاثِمِينَ

**"But the (mighty) blast did seize the wrong-doers, and they lay prostrate in their homes by the morning,-"
(Hud 11: 94)**

فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الرَّجْفَةُ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دَارِهِمْ جَاثِمِينَ

**"Then the mighty Blast seized them, and they lay prostrate in their homes by the morning."
(Ankaboot 29: 37)**

Earthquake and blast refer to an overwhelming torment.

أَلَا بُعْدًا لِمَدْيَنَ كَمَا بَعَدَتْ ثَمُودُ

**"Ah! Behold! How the Madyan were removed (from sight) as were removed the Thamud!"
(Hud 11: 95)**

Thamud infact dwelt at their place earlier.

¹Numbers 31

فَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا قَوْمِ لَقَدْ أَبْلَغْتُكُمْ رِسَالَاتِ رَبِّي وَنَصَحْتُ لَكُمْ فَكَيْفَ آسَىٰ عَلَىٰ قَوْمٍ كَافِرِينَ

"So Shu'aib left them, saying: "O my people! I did indeed convey to you the messages for which I was sent by my Lord: I gave you good counsel, but how shall I lament over a people who refuse to believe!"

(A'raaf 7: 93)

وَلَمَّا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا نَجَّيْنَا شُعَيْبًا وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ بِرَحْمَةٍ مِنَّا

"When Our decree issued, We saved Shu'aib and those who believed with him, by (special) mercy from Ourselves:"

(Hud 11: 94)

Who were the followers of Shoaib? Only his family and close his relations! Therefore the disbelievers said;

وَلَوْلَا رَهْطُكَ لَرَجَمْنَاكَ

"Were it not for thy family, we should certainly have stoned thee!"

(Hud 11: 91)

Prophet Shoaib said in response;

أَرَهْطِي أَعَزُّ عَلَيْكُم مِّنَ اللَّهِ

"is then my family of more consideration with you than Allah?"

(Hud 11: 92)

These verses prove that family of Prophet Shoaib were his follower and these were the people who found deliverance along with him.

Agreement between Bible and the Quran:

In the above verses few things have been claimed; Prophet Shoaib and his family alienated themselves from the people of Midian and they were saved from the torment.

When Moses decided to move to Canaan after the first battle of Midian, the following dialogue took place;

"And Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses' father in law, We are journeying unto the place of which the LORD said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the LORD hath spoken good concerning Israel. And he said unto him, I will not go; but I will depart to mine own land, and to my kindred. And he said, Leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes."

(Numbers 10:29-31)

At another place it is said;

"And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father in law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which lieth in the south of Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people."

(Judges 1:16)

Just a chapter prior to the mentioning of the battle of Midian, it is stated;

"Now Heber the Kenite, *which was of the children of Hobab the father in law of Moses, had severed himself from the Kenites, and pitched his tent unto the plain of Zaanaim, which is by Kedesh.*"

(Judges 4:11)

In the Babylonian Talmud it is written;

"Jethro opposed him and when his advice was not heard, he left his office, therefore his children were taken as the members of Sanhedrin¹."²

Josephus the Jew who wrote the history of Jews in the first century of Christian era writes;

"They gave a piece of land to the family of Jethro the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, who left their homeland and dwelt with them in the desert."³

The general annihilation of Midian which is mentioned in the Quran is proved many ways from the Bible. Firstly for the destruction of Midian, Bible uses the following words;

"And they warred against the Midianites, as the LORD commanded Moses; and they slew all the males.... therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman..."

(Numbers 31:7, 17)

Secondly, afterwards the destruction of Midian has been proverbial in the Jewish scriptures. In the Psalms of David it is said;

"The tabernacles of Edom, and the Ishmaelites; of Moab, and the Hagarenes; Gebal, and Ammon, and AmalekDo unto them as *unto the Midianites;*"

(Psalms 83:6-9)

Prophet Isaiah says;

"And the LORD of hosts shall stir up a scourge for him according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb:"

(Isaiah 10:26)

Previous History of Midian:

However the city of Midian continued to exist, signs of which are found even in the Islamic era. Prophet David whose time is around 1000 B.C. makes a mention of the People of Midian in Psalms (83: 6). During the times of Prophet Solomon an Edomite prince Hadad fled to Midian (1 Kings 11: 17-18). Prophet Isaiah who was around 800 B.C. mentions the dromedaries of Midian who will bring gold and incense to Jerusalem (Isaiah 60: 6). Prophet Habakuk prophesizing of a great prophet says; '**the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble**' (Habakuk 3: 7)

¹Sanhedrin: The Supreme Court of the Jews whose leader was called Cohen and besides him there were 70 more members.

²Richard F. Burton, *Gold Mines of Midian*, p.188

³Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book V, chapter 2

Greek and Roman writers have not mentioned Midian rather they call this place Modytia because at that time the Nebatians lived in this land¹ and this precisely according to our theory. One of the children of Ishmael was Nebat and with reference to Bible we have proved that after the destruction of the Midianites the Ishmaelite Arabs lived in Midian. However Batlemos has mentioned a place in Arabia named Modiana which some people understand as Midian.²

Muslim Geographers have generally mentioned Midian. Abu al-Fida has written in his *Geography* that some archaeological remains are found here. Haji Khalifa in his Turkish geography *Jahan-numa* has written some of the remnants here have names of the kings carved on them.

Among the apocalyptic of Europe certain individuals made a special study into the archaeological remains of Midian, prominent among them is Burton. He once traveled to Makkah and Medina and later under the instruction of Ismael Pasha, the Khedive of Egypt, traveled to Midian in 1887 in pursuit of gold. (Back) during the reign of the Romans the people of this region embraced Christianity, the verses of Muslim poets testify to this. Kathir says³;

رُهبانُ مدين والذين عاهدُتهم ... يكون من حذر العقاب قُعوداً
رُهبان مدين لو رأوك تترلوا ... والعُصم في شَعف الجبال الفادر

¹Charles Forster, *The Historical Geography of Arabia*, vol.2 p.333

²Richard F. Burton, *Gold Mines of Midian*, p.179

³Yaqut al-Hamvi, *Mu'jam al-Baldan*, vol.4 p.65